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SENSITIVE

STATE FOR WHA/BSC, WHA/AND, AND OAS
STATE PASS TO USAID LAC/AA
NSC FOR KIMBERLY BREIER
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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: PARAGUAY'S AMBASSADOR TO VENEZUELA ATTACKED IN
CARACAS, LODGES COMPLAINT

1. (U) On 4/12, Ambassador received a telephone call from Senator Alejandro Velazquez Ugarte, informing him that Paraguay's Ambassador to Venezuela, Ana Maria Figueredo, was the victim of a violent physical attack in Caracas on 4/8. An unidentified assailant attacked Figueredo as she approached her vehicle, after leaving a Mass held in memory of Pope Juan Paul II at Caracas's Metropolitan Cathedral. The attack occurred approximately five blocks from the Cathedral, on a street adjacent to the Venezuelan MFA. Figueredo suffered injuries to her face and chest, and was rendered unconscious for several minutes. Figueredo's driver carried her to a side entrance of the MFA, but they were neither afforded assistance nor permitted to drive the vehicle onto the premises, requiring Figueredo instead to walk back to the vehicle with the driver's assistance.

2. (U) Figueredo, who is a Senator with leave of absence to serve as Ambassador, wrote a letter to Senator Miguel Carrizosa, President of Paraguay's Congress, detailing the events and complaining about the GOV's lack of response. In the letter, she noted that, despite repeated written and oral requests, the GOV has failed to provide security for her or for the Embassy. Velazquez, in his capacity as President of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, sent a formal letter of complaint to Saul Ortega Campos, President of the Venezuelan National Assembly's Permanent Committee on Foreign Policy.

3. (U) In statements to the press on 4/12, Venezuela's Ambassador to Paraguay, Jose Huerta Castillo, accused unnamed opponents of President Hugo Chavez for the attack on Figueredo, asserting that it was part of a campaign to discredit Chavez's government and provoke international discord. Huerta highlighted that the attack occurred on the day that, "for the first time, the imperialist candidate did not achieve its objective of attaining the Secretary Generalship of the OAS," which he explained was a reference to Mexican candidate Luis Derbez, who tied with Chilean candidate Miguel Insulza in five rounds of voting at the OAS on 4/8.

4. (SBU) Comment: Although the motive is unclear, it appears that Figueredo may have been singled out for the attack. The assailant apparently waited for her near her vehicle, and beat her but did not rob her. A number of other diplomats and dignitaries attended the Mass, and parked in the same area, but were not attacked. In her letter to Carrizosa, Figueredo noted that she attended the Mass at the official invitation of the GOV.

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